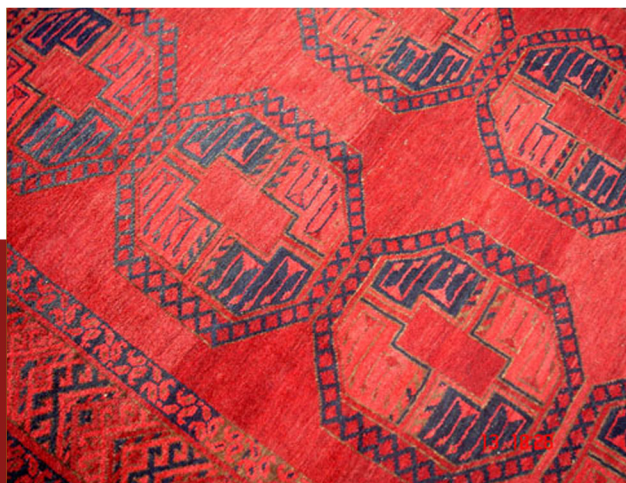


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Independent Final Evaluation of the Demobilization of Child Soldiers and Socioeconomic Reintegration of War-Affected Young People in Afghanistan (D&R) Project

United Nations Children's Fund

Cooperative Agreement Number: E-9-K-0006



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Funding for this evaluation was provided by the United States Department of Labor under Task Order number DOLQ059622437. Points of view or opinions in this evaluation report do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labor, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAA	ActionAid Afghanistan
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
ANBP	Afghanistan New Beginnings Program (GTIRA)
AREA	Agency for Rehabilitation & Energy Conservation in Afghanistan
AREP	Afghanistan Rehabilitation and Educational Programs
Aschiana	Afghan Street Working Children and New Approach
BEFA	Basic Education for Afghans
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CCF	Christian Children's Fund, operated as CFA in Afghanistan
CFA	Children's Fund Afghanistan
CS	Child Soldiers
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Program (adult soldiers)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
D&R	UNICEF Demobilization and Reintegration Project
EAC	Education and Aid Center
EI	Education Initiative
GTIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HDCAW	Health and Development Center for Afghan Women
HELP	<i>Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.</i>
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
IMC	International Medical Corps
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LDRC	Local Demobilization and Reintegration Committee (D&R project)
MDDT	Mobile Demobilization Documentation Team
MOCY	Ministry of Culture and Youth (GTIRA)
MOE	Ministry of Education (GTIRA)
MOLSAMD	Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled (GTIRA)
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NHJA	National Humanitarian Juvenile Afghanistan

OCFT	Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (USDOL-ILAB)
RVC	Regional Verification Committee (DDR program)
SAB	<i>Solidarité Afghanistan Belgique</i>
SC-S	Save the Children-Sweden
TIRA	The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
TOR	Terms of Reference (for this evaluation)
SFRD	Sharq Foundation for Rehabilitation & Development
UMCOR	United Methodist Committee on Relief
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDOL	United States Department of Labor
VARA	Voluntary Association for Rehabilitation of Afghanistan
WAC	War-Affected Children
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This was an independent evaluation of a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) project that received funding (US\$3 million) from the United States Department of Labor (USDOL). The project being evaluated was the Demobilization of Child Soldiers and Socio-Economic Reintegration of War-Affected Young People in Afghanistan (called the “D&R” project). The four-year project was scheduled to end in December 2007.

Introduction

ILAB, OCFT, and EI

The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) in USDOL provides international technical assistance to a range of labor-related projects. In ILAB, the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) administers grants and contracts to organizations working to eliminate child labor around the world. The USDOL also administers a Child Labor Education Initiative (EI) that works to promote the development, health, safety, and future economic security of children around the world by supporting projects that withdraw or prevent children from exploitive work situations and increase access to basic education for children at risk.

The D&R Project

In May 2003, USDOL approved a UNICEF proposal and signed a cooperative agreement with UNICEF for a project in Afghanistan to demobilize child soldiers and other children associated with the fighting forces and reintegrate war-affected young people, including, but not limited to, the former child soldiers. This D&R project was funded under the EI program.

The D&R project was designed to assist the rehabilitation, psychosocial recovery, education, and economic reintegration of two broad categories of young people: child soldiers and war-affected children/young people. The major components of the reintegration program were—

- **Literacy and numeracy education.** This consisted of a nine-month course that used the government’s (MOE) official nine-month literacy curriculum and textbooks. The children attended classes for three hours a day, six days a week. Depending on the province, the course taught literacy in either Dari or Pashto, the two national languages.
- **Psychosocial education and activities.** These included lessons in what are called “life skills” in Afghanistan as well as the encouragement of children to play team sports and games and the provision of sports equipment. The literacy textbooks contained the life skills lessons that covered a wide range of topics, including Afghan history and geography, health and personal hygiene, human rights, learning respect for others, agriculture, managing natural resources, nutrition, mine awareness, etc.
- **Vocational education.** This usually consisted of a nine-month course or apprenticeship period. A variety of vocational options were offered in each province. Each child selected and was then trained for nine months in one vocation. At the end of the vocational course,

the program provided each graduate with a tool kit or, for those who chose agriculture or animal husbandry, a selection of livestock and seeds.

Terminology

Children are defined as any person under 18 years of age. Child soldiers were defined according to the Cape Town Principles: “Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity... It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms” (UNICEF, 1997). There is no equivalent universal definition of a war-affected child. The D&R project emphasized the most disadvantaged children: those orphaned by the war; those whose families were short of food; and out-of-work, out-of-school, street children. The text uses acronyms: CS for child soldier(s) and WAC for war-affected children. When both categories are included, this report will refer to CSWAC.

Ministries

The implementation of this project was coordinated with and supported by two ministries of the Government of The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GTIRA):

- The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which is now the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyred, and Disabled (MOLSAMD)
- The Ministry of Education (MOE)

In February 2004, MOLSAMD signed a letter of agreement with USDOL to assist this project to provide access to nonformal and formal education, skills development, life skills, and psychosocial support to help reintegrate these children into society and better link them to the labor market.

Other ministries became involved, as well. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs was instrumental in incorporating eligible war-affected girls into the reintegration program. Beginning in early 2007, the last year of the project, the Ministry of Culture and Youth (MOCY) became involved. To ensure protection of the most vulnerable and at-risk youth, the D&R project was incorporated into the National Youth Joint Program, which is an emerging national program for youth protection and development under the leadership of MOCY.

Evaluation Methodology and Itinerary

The primary methodology used in this evaluation was the collection of primary data through interviewing individuals and groups of stakeholders, community leaders, CS (all of whom were boys), and WAC (boys and girls). The evaluator also reviewed documents and reports. The evaluator, Dr. Art Hansen, had previously designed and evaluated demobilization and reintegration programs for soldiers, CS, and WAC in four African countries.

Confidentiality

No personal names were recorded during the interviews and no information was collected that would identify specific individuals as CS or WAC. Individuals were assured that their information would be treated confidentially. An independent interpreter was hired who was not an employee of UNICEF or the NGOs who implemented the project.

Itinerary

The evaluation began with a desk review in the United States (June 18–22) of documents, followed by a two-week tour (June 24 to July 6) of Afghanistan. While in Afghanistan, Dr. Hansen interviewed the representatives of 12 institutional stakeholders:

- Three UN agencies—UNICEF, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
- Three GTIRA ministries—MOLSAMD, MOE, and MOCY
- Four international and two national NGOs—ActionAid Afghanistan (AAA), Children’s Fund Afghanistan (CFA), Solidarité Afghanistan Belgique (SAB), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), National Humanitarian Juvenile Afghanistan (NHJA), and Afghanistan Rehabilitation and Educational Programs (AREP)

The evaluator visited six D&R project sites in three provinces in the northern region. The sites were Balkh in Balkh Province, Sheberghan in Jawzjan Province, and four sites in Faryab Province—Meyan-Goy and Khoja Aabad in Pashtonkot District, Yangy Qala in Khuja Sabzposh District, and Family Shar in Sherintagab District. In one site, CSWAC had already graduated, while the program was currently active in the other five sites. In these six sites, he interviewed 46 former CS and 59 WAC (55 girls and 4 boys) and discussed the program and the children’s progress with 44 men and 4 women who were members of district-level community committees that monitored the program in their respective localities. Two key informants were interviewed who provided important information about programs in which they had participated. Dr. Hansen appreciated the hospitality shown by many Afghans in their offices, villages, and districts and the assistance provided by UNICEF and NGOs.

Unfortunately, security issues and lack of time limited the evaluator’s ability to talk with more people and visit more sites. Earlier itineraries had included visits to three provinces (Kandahar, Khost, and Ghazni) in the central and south regions, but security precautions and infrequent UN flights resulted in visiting only three northern provinces.

Findings

The project came close to meeting its targets, which were to demobilize all CS (estimated to number 8,000) and to reintegrate 7,750 CS and 7,000 WAC, or a total of 14,750 children, throughout the country (all 34 provinces). The WAC were to be evenly divided between the genders (approximately 3,500 girls and 3,500 boys).

Demobilization occurred in all provinces, but security concerns limited reintegration activities to 29 provinces. In all, the project demobilized 7,476 CS, the total number of CS who were identified. The earlier estimate of 8,000 had been an overestimate. The project also succeeded in providing full reintegration benefits to 7,563 boys and 3,916 girls, or a total of 11,479 children. A major reason for this shortfall was the prevailing insecurity; the project never managed to implement reintegration in four provinces for security reasons. Overall, the project learned and adapted from its experiences to overcome obstacles.

Even more children (12,725) received some of the benefits of the reintegration program, even if they did not complete all of the courses. For example, 8,539 boys completed vocational training, but did not complete the literacy course, while 4,186 girls completed the literacy course, but not the vocational skills training. The number of girls that the project reintegrated exceeded the original target of 3,500.

Four EI Goals

In addition to providing direct education and training opportunities to working children and those at risk of engaging in exploitive work, the EI has four goals:

1. Raise awareness about the importance of education for all children and mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand educational infrastructures.
2. Strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend schools.
3. Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor.
4. Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

Each EI project must feed into these goals.

First EI Goal

The D&R project satisfied the first EI goal of raising awareness of the importance of education and mobilizing actors to improve education infrastructures. The project raised people's awareness at the community level of the importance of education for boys and girls. Community-level D&R committees were formed in 159 districts in 29 provinces, and the committee members were educated about children's rights and the importance of education. One of the outcomes of the project was a broader public acceptance of and desire for education for girls.

A wide array of actors was mobilized for this project. UNICEF worked with 20 NGOs, some of which were already working with children's issues and education, while others learned from UNICEF and this project. Two important ministries (MOLSAMD and MOE) were involved at national and provincial levels. Hundreds of mullahs (religious leaders) and other community-level leaders were mobilized in 159 districts.

Second EI Goal

The project itself did not satisfy the second EI goal of strengthening formal and transitional education systems, but administering the project did strengthen UNICEF's efforts to satisfy the goal through its other programs. UNICEF strengthened the formal educational system with its Back to School program that rebuilt and equipped schools throughout the country. UNICEF strengthened the transitional educational system by working with MOE to update, publish, and distribute literacy textbooks; to establish and institutionalize a system of testing and certifying graduates of the literacy program; and then to accept certified graduates into the formal school system. This transitional system permitted many D&R graduates to enter the formal school system and also provided a bridge to help other working and at-risk children access the formal school system.

Third EI Goal

The project itself did not satisfy the third EI goal of strengthening national institutions and policies on education and child labor, but administering the project did strengthen UNICEF's efforts to satisfy the goal through its other programs. UNICEF encouraged the government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to issue presidential decrees setting the minimum age (18 years) for enrollment into the national army, and to establish the National Strategy for Children at Risk. UNICEF strengthened MOE through other initiatives in addition to the Back to School and literacy programs.

Fourth EI Goal

Success in achieving the fourth EI goal (long-term sustainability) was less certain. In terms of policies and national institutions, the country's insecurity and the well-known policies of the armed opposition to the government dominated other factors. The Taliban had burned schools and attacked teachers (destroying educational infrastructure) across the country and remained opposed to the education of girls. The Taliban and various warlords had not agreed to stop recruiting children as soldiers. Insecurity meant that the GTIRA had to focus on defense rather than on the use of its resources for longer term educational concerns. At the community level, insecurity also had the potential to inhibit or reverse the gains made in accepting girls' education.

Long-term sustainability was also uncertain in terms of the personal gains made by the CS and WAC who had graduated. They had been educated (literacy, numeracy, and vocations), but their future schooling and employment depended on the status of the nation's schools and economy. Another factor contributing to uncertainty about the future status of graduates of the D&R project was that there was no tracking mechanism to monitor whether the graduates continued their schooling or employment.

Even with all of these obstacles to assuring longer term sustainability, the project succeeded in establishing local and national institutions and in educating local, provincial, and national people who provide support to sustain the educational programs and the gains made by the children who benefited from the project. These supports included local reintegration and child protection communities, local and provincial administrators, and the transitional linkage (mainstreaming) of the literacy component and graduates to the formal school system. The local committees that

were established appeared to be able to continue their self-governance role and their advocacy and awareness-raising efforts after the project had stopped in their locality.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Some of the lessons learned and best practices that affected the project's achievement of its goals included the following.

Including WAC with CS

The Afghanistan D&R project included both CS and WAC in the reintegration program. This is a lesson learned from experiences in other countries. Assistance should not be packaged in ways that segregate CS and appear to confer an advantage to those children who chose or were forced to become associated with the fighting forces.

Reaching Out to Rural Areas

The project policy was that reintegration program sites should be located wherever there were concentrations of CS, a rural phenomenon in Afghanistan because they were mobilized by commanders in rural areas. The project did not require the CS to come to urban training centers. D&R project sites were scattered across districts and primarily in rural areas. Bringing educational and vocational programs to local CS provided an obvious rationale for the project to establish itself in rural sites. The combination of far-flung rural sites and the building of trust during the reintegration program meant that the D&R project had a major multiplier effect across a wide and difficult-to-reach swath of rural Afghanistan.

Promoting Girls' Education

The project asked that the number of WAC equal the number of CS, and the number of girl WAC equal the number of boy WAC. Requiring large numbers of girl WAC was a best practice that promoted girls' education. The D&R project has had multiplier effects that opened the door in some districts to more programs for children and more educational opportunities for girls.

Mainstreaming Literacy Graduates into Formal Schools

One of the most important problems accompanying any sort of special education program is the support of children after they graduate. Mainstreaming means connecting the graduates of the literacy program to the formal school system. UNICEF addressed this mainstreaming issue by working with the MOE in a number of ways, some of which were integral to the D&R project, and all of which were essential. Graduates of the D&R project who wanted to continue their education entered a mainstream formal educational program as soon as they entered the D&R literacy program.

Local Participation and Governance

The focus of the D&R project was the children/youth. However, another best practice was the formation and operation of the local community committee, or *shura*. The *shura* were created to assist the D&R project, but the elders and leaders became involved to solve social problems,

family conflicts, and conflicts over irrigation water that could have resulted in violence. The D&R project created a local governance mechanism that people in the districts may use to help solve local problems peacefully. In countries where security is less of a problem, this project might be run from the top down, but in Afghanistan, *shura* support was essential for the smooth operation and success of this project.

Comprehensive Approach

The project did not rely on any single method, but used a more comprehensive approach that incorporated literacy and vocational education, recruited and educated parents and local leaders about children's rights, provided a substitute income for the families while their children were in classes, established local child protection committees, and involved ministries.

Tracking

The importance of tracking beneficiaries after graduation is a lesson learned for future programs, but, unfortunately, was not a best practice of this project.

Conclusions

The D&R project succeeded in establishing a widespread (164 districts in 29 provinces) program of literacy, life skills, and vocational training, plus its psychosocial and medical components, in a country that was still insecure in many districts. The D&R project included an equivalent number of CS and WAC with gender equity among the WAC. This approach immediately began the process of integrating the CS with other children and fit the D&R project into a broader context of educating all children and attacking illiteracy, which fit within the broader context of national socioeconomic recovery. The project also succeeded in establishing *shura* (local committees) in districts throughout the country that provided community-based leadership and support for children's education and a mechanism for local self-governance.

The project succeeded in providing full reintegration benefits to 7,563 boys and 3,916 girls, or a total of 11,479 children. A major reason why the project did not achieve its original target was because the project never managed to implement reintegration in four provinces for security reasons. Even more children (12,725) received some of the benefits of the reintegration program, although they did not complete all of the courses.

The evaluator's perspective is that the primary objective of the D&R project was to provide the children with an educational and vocational head start to a better future. The evaluator's opinion is that this seems to have been accomplished successfully for many of the graduates of the D&R project. The majority of those who were interested in continuing their formal education seem to have been successful in entering the formal school system. Similarly, the majority of those who decided to start working immediately seem to have been employed, started earning an income from their home, or opened shops on their own.

What remains uncertain and a matter of opinion is whether the graduates of the reintegration program were able over the longer term of several years to maintain their employment and place in the formal school system. No one established any long-term tracking of the graduates.

Therefore, no one knows how successful the graduates were afterward in terms of continuing their schooling or employment.

UNICEF has leveraged and extended the impact of the USDOL funding by combining it with other funds coming from a variety of organizations. In this way, US\$3 million from USDOL helped generate a total of US\$7 million for this D&R project. Some of the NGOs also received other funding to build on and extend the D&R project.

In addition to implementing the D&R project, UNICEF has a broader program of children's rights and education that extends beyond and has facilitated the cooperative agreement between UNICEF and USDOL. UNICEF has succeeded in mobilizing and coordinating a wide range of stakeholders at the national, provincial, and community level to raise the awareness of the importance of children's rights, protection, and education (including CS and WAC, boys and girls). This broader agenda includes implementing the Back to School Program, encouraging the GTIRA to ratify the Optional Protocol for the Protection of Children, promoting a Presidential decree setting the minimum age (18 years) for enrollment into the national army, establishing the National Strategy for Children at Risk, and cooperating in the emerging National Youth Program, which is coordinated by the MOCY. All of these activities are fully congruent with USDOL's EI goals.

Overall, UNICEF and its NGO implementing partners have achieved the purposes of the D&R project. USDOL has achieved even more because its funding provided important and timely support that strengthened UNICEF's and the NGOs' continued involvement in Afghan children's protection and educational programs.

Recommendations

Separate child and adult soldiers during reintegration. Child soldiers have different needs, vulnerabilities, opportunities (such as the potential to continue schooling), and rights than adults. Child soldier reintegration programs should be separated or distinct from the programs for adults.

Combine war-affected children with child soldiers during reintegration. Establishing programs that provide post-conflict services and benefits only to child soldiers delays the social and educational reintegration of the former soldiers and sends the wrong message about the advantages of becoming a soldier.

Require gender parity among the war-affected children who are selected for the reintegration program. This is an excellent opportunity to alleviate gender disadvantages in education.

Emphasize local communal participation and leadership in establishing and managing reintegration programs. Social reintegration occurs at the family and community levels. The advantages of emphasizing local involvement and control are very apparent in Afghanistan because of the insecurity and cultural/religious mistrust. Everywhere, even in secure post-conflict situations, the success and sustainability of social reintegration relies on local acceptance and leadership.

Identify and address family income restraints and opportunities. Family poverty may inhibit the willingness of families to enroll their children and the ability of children to devote time to their education. Reducing family poverty may be essential to the success of a child-oriented program.

Conduct market surveys before deciding on vocational skills training and before selecting the skills to be taught. Skills training is appropriate only when there are post-completion employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. There may be only a limited local market for any specific skill or trade.

Establish transitional linkages to mainstream institutions and sustainable futures whenever possible. Address the question of what happens post-completion. See if there are ways to link and process the transition of literacy graduates into formal schools. See if there are ways to link graduates of vocational programs to employment or micro-credit to establish shops.

Establish post-completion tracking as an integral component in any reintegration and educational programs for children. The only way to monitor and evaluate the impact, success, and sustainability of reintegration and educational programs is to track children for several years after they complete the program. The only way to identify the best practices that contribute to longer-term sustainable programs is to monitor/track children post-completion. Plans and funding for this tracking should be an integral part of the original design for these programs.

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I INTRODUCTION

This is an independent evaluation of a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) project that received funding (US\$3 million) from the United States Department of Labor (USDOL). The project is called the Demobilization of Child Soldiers and Socio-Economic Reintegration of War-Affected Young People in Afghanistan (called the "D&R" project in this report). The D&R project began in 2003 and is scheduled to end in December 2007 when the activities in Kandahar Province are completed.

This report must start by acknowledging the evaluator's appreciation for the hospitality and courteous welcome that were shown him by so many Afghans in their offices, villages, and districts. UNICEF provided the transport and facilities that were essential to conduct this evaluation, and the Child Protection staff of UNICEF shepherded the evaluator very graciously. nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) organized opportunities for the evaluator to meet and interview the children/youth who are in (or who graduated from) their programs as well as community leaders and local D&R committee members. Community leaders and youth waited for the evaluator to arrive, welcomed him, agreed to be interviewed, and provided much insight into the situation in Afghanistan and the operation of the project. The evaluator thanks all of these people and organizations for their help and hospitality.

The D&R project focuses on two broad categories of young people: child soldiers and other war-affected children/young people. The project began four years ago, and some of the young people who participated in the project as children may now be adults (aged 18 or over). The evaluator was informed that some Afghan youth who are still under 18 also might be insulted or offended if they were called "children" during the interviews. It was decided that the terms "boy" and "girl" would not be offensive. These terms (boy and girl) were used in the interviews and are used in this report.

Different organizations in Afghanistan have used various terms to refer to the subjects of this project. They have been called underage/child soldiers, minors associated with the fighting forces, war-affected children and youth, children and youth, and young people. However, this evaluation will follow commonly accepted international practice in definitions and terminology. This evaluation will refer to child soldiers and war-affected children. Children are defined internationally as any person under 18 years of age. Child soldiers are defined according to the universally recognized Cape Town Principles:

"Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity... It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms." (UNICEF, 1997)

There is no universally accepted definition of a war-affected child. Usually this term is applied to a child who has been directly disadvantaged by the war or by combatants. The child might have been orphaned as a result of the war. The child's family might have been impoverished because the war or combatants destroyed the home, farm, business, or the local economy. The child might have been sexually abused, tortured, or traumatized by commanders or combatants. At

other times, the term might be applied to all the children in a region or country if observers think that the impact of warfare has significantly affected the standard of living of all the children.

To simplify the text, acronyms will be used: CS for child soldier(s) and WAC for war-affected children. When both categories are included, this report will refer to CSWAC. It should be apparent from the text when the CS term is referring to still-mobilized or to former (demobilized) child soldiers.

The evaluator, Dr. Art Hansen, has previous experience designing and evaluating demobilization and reintegration programs for child soldiers, other children associated with the fighting forces, and war-affected children/youths in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. He also led a team of social scientists interviewing combatants in Angola to assist the United Nations to design demobilization and reintegration programs for all soldiers.

II INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

It is important to provide some background about the institutions involved in this project. The USDOL has contracted this independent evaluation. Although the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the primary institution for American foreign aid, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) within USDOL provides international technical assistance to a range of labor-related projects. Within this Bureau (ILAB) the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) administers grants and contracts to organizations that are working to eliminate child labor around the world.

Through a collaborative agreement with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the USDOL has provided significant funding to become the leading donor to the International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC). The ILO-IPEC works to remove or prevent children from involvement in exploitive or hazardous labor by increasing children's access to and participation in formal and nonformal education. The USDOL also administers a Child Labor Education Initiative (EI) that works to promote the development, health, safety, and future economic security of children around the world by supporting projects that withdraw or prevent children from exploitive work situations and increase access to basic education for children at risk. This D&R project was funded under the EI program.

In addition to providing direct education and training opportunities to working children and those at risk of engaging in exploitive work, the EI has four goals:

- Raise awareness about the importance of education for all children and mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand educational infrastructures.
- Strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend schools.
- Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

In 2003, UNICEF proposed that the USDOL fund an EI project in Afghanistan to facilitate—

- The demobilization of CS and other children associated with the fighting forces.
- The reintegration of WAC including, but not limited to, the ex-soldiers.

The project was designed to assist the rehabilitation, psychosocial recovery, resocialization, education, and economic reintegration of these children/youth. The three major components of the reintegration program were—

- Literacy and numeracy education
- Psychosocial education and activities

- Vocational education and equipment

A cooperative agreement between UNICEF and USDOL was signed in May 2003. The project targeted 7,750 children who were associated with the fighting forces (called CS in this report) and another 7,000 WAC for a total of 14,750 children. The project would withdraw the CS from soldiering and prevent the WAC from becoming soldiers or becoming involved in other worst forms of child labor. The D&R project was to last four years and end in 2007.

The implementation of this UNICEF project was coordinated with and supported by two ministries of the Government of The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GTIRA):

- The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which is now the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyred, and Disabled (MOLSAMD).
- The Ministry of Education (MOE).

In February 2004, MOLSAMD signed a Letter of Agreement with USDOL to assist this project to provide access to nonformal and formal education, skills development, life skills, and psychosocial support to help reintegrate these children into society and better link them to the labor market.

Other ministries became involved as well. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was instrumental in incorporating eligible war-affected girls into the reintegration program. Beginning in early 2007, the last year of the project, MOCY became involved. To ensure protection of the most vulnerable and at-risk youth, the D&R project was incorporated into the National Youth Joint Program, which is an emerging national program for youth protection and development under the leadership of MOCY.

III GOALS OF THIS EVALUATION

The four-year D&R project began in 2003 and ends later this year (2007). This end-of-project evaluation is intended to assess this specific USDOL-UNICEF project, to address and analyze some broader questions, and to synthesize lessons learned that may be applied to other OCFT programs and EI projects. The goals are both broad and ambitious:

1. Help the organizations involved identify areas where performance was good and areas where project implementation could be improved.
2. Assist the OCFT in learning more about what works or does not work in terms of the overall conceptualization and design of EI projects within the broad OCFT technical cooperation program framework.
3. Assess the degree to which the objectives relevant to this specific project and country have been achieved.
4. Assess progress in terms of children's working and educational status.
5. Assess what would constitute "successful" reintegration given the context and scope of the D&R project. Assess what can be achieved by a 12-month reintegration program.
6. Provide insights into how the reintegration of children associated with the fighting forces can fit within the broader context of national socioeconomic recovery and reconstruction.
7. Examine the issue of how to engage out-of-school, out-of-work youth (i.e., youth at risk).

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IV METHODOLOGY OF THIS EVALUATION

The primary methodology used in this evaluation was the collection of primary data by interviewing individuals and groups who belonged to five populations:

- Stakeholders
- D&R project directors and staff members
- Community leaders and members of district D&R committees
- CS, all of whom were boys
- WAC, both boys and girls

NGO staffers who directed D&R project sites and local community hires (teachers, social workers, and skilled craftsmen/vocational tutors) were the people who really implemented the reintegration program on the ground. They were in face-to-face contact with the CSWAC and knew the history of interaction between the D&R project and the local community leaders.

Reintegration of CS and WAC refers to their reestablishing roles and statuses in their local communities. Local community leaders, especially those who served on D&R committees, were instrumental in identifying CS and WAC, in permitting and facilitating the acceptance by the community of the D&R project, and in monitoring the attendance and participation of CSWAC in the courses.

In addition to stakeholders, the evaluator interviewed D&R project directors and staff, community leaders, and other individuals knowledgeable about the program and/or the environmental (sociopolitical and military) conditions in which the D&R project operated. This included knowledge of the demobilization phase and the conditions that existed at that time.

CS and WAC are and were the clients and targets of the project, and the key issue to be evaluated is how effectively they were served. The CS and WAC differed in terms of their military experience, might have had different needs and interests, might have benefited more (or less) from various aspects of the project, and might have had different experiences in the local community or workplace after graduating from the program. Because of these potential differences, the evaluator tried to interview CS and WAC separately. The evaluator tried to interview as many CS and WAC as possible individually and in (focus) group discussions. Another variable was whether the CS or WAC were still in the reintegration program or had already graduated. As many representatives from both sets as possible were interviewed.

In addition to primary data collection, the evaluator reviewed documents and reports pertaining to the D&R program being evaluated, to The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (TIRA), and to similar D&R programs for CS and WAC in other countries. The review started in the United States before the evaluator traveled to Afghanistan, continued during his stay in that country, and resumed when he was writing and revising the final report in the U.S.

4.1 CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is essential for both the protection of human subjects and to promote the free flow of more accurate information. Anonymity is one key to this. No personal names were asked for or collected during the interviews and group discussions with CSWAC and community leaders. No information was collected or used in reporting that would identify specific individuals as CS or WAC. Individuals were assured that their information would be treated confidentially.

An interpreter was needed, as the evaluator did not speak Pashto or Dari, the two official Afghan languages. In order to encourage informants to report criticism as well as praise, an independent interpreter was hired who was not an employee of any of the agencies (UNICEF and NGOs) being evaluated. It was intended that interviews be private, between the informants and the evaluator, accompanied by only the interpreter, which would strengthen the confidentiality.

Unfortunately, although the independent interpreter was hired, all of the interviews of CS, WAC, and community leaders occurred in the presence of a UNICEF child protection officer and at least one NGO site director. This happened because of several circumstances. First, security considerations required the evaluator to travel in a convoy of two UNICEF vehicles and to be accompanied by a UNICEF official. Second, NGO site directors were needed to set up dates for interviews and to guide the evaluator to the project sites that were scattered throughout districts and villages. Third, the onsite NGO officials had already established a trusting relationship with the local community leaders, CS, and WAC. The presence of known NGO staff reassured local people and encouraged them to be interviewed. In addition, a number of the interviews required the NGO staff to translate from Dari into Uzbek, as people in many localities in the northern region were native Uzbek-speakers, and less comfortable in Dari. Neither the hired interpreter nor the UNICEF official was fluent in Uzbek.

The presence of UNICEF and NGO personnel did not appear to inhibit the informants or affect the reporting of problems that were revealed as a result of the evaluator's probing questions. Most of the problems that were reported in the interviews had already been reported to UNICEF in the NGO monthly or final reports.

4.2 ITINERARY AND MEETINGS

There is a large group of stakeholders in this program. These include ministries and offices of the Government of The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GTIRA) at national and provincial levels, U.S. and UN agencies, and international and national NGOs. The evaluator met with and interviewed representatives of many of these stakeholders during the visit to Afghanistan. Stakeholders were interviewed in their offices in Kabul and Mazar or at UN offices. In an advertised meeting with stakeholders at the end of the in-country visit, the evaluator presented his tentative findings both orally and in a 12-page written report that was distributed to everyone who attended the meeting. The presentation emphasized his willingness to learn from their comments and criticisms and his desire to receive any additional information they wished to provide him after the debriefing. (The written report is attached as an annex.)

The other four populations were all encountered at D&R project sites and interviewed using questionnaires that the evaluator had prepared (copies of these are attached as annexes at the end of this report). In each D&R project site, the evaluator tried to interview people from all four populations. Project directors were interviewed individually, whereas almost all of the other interviews were with discussion groups. Each discussion group consisted of people from only one population—CS, WAC, or community members. The groups were also separated by gender. Girls and boys were interviewed in separate groups, as were men and women.

The program currently operates and has operated widely across The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The evaluator was not able to visit near the range of sites where the program currently operates and has operated in the past. His itinerary included a variety of locations with an attempt to maximize the time he spent talking with, listening to, and observing people in a range of locations. The sites varied in two ways:

- Geographically by province
- By time in the program:
 - There are provinces/districts where the program was no longer active, and CSWAC had graduated from the program. The evaluator could learn about longer term impacts and the perceptions of local people after the program had phased out.
 - There are provinces/districts where the program is currently operating. The evaluator was able to observe and interview CSWAC and communities that are now experiencing the reintegration program.

The evaluation began June 18–22, 2007 with a desk review in the United States of documents, followed by a two-week tour of Afghanistan. The evaluator arrived in Kabul on June 24 and departed on July 6. During his stay, he interviewed the representatives of 12 institutional stakeholders:

1. Three UN agencies—UNICEF, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).
2. Three GTIRA ministries—MOLSAMD, MOE, and MOCY.
3. Four international and two national NGOs—ActionAid Afghanistan (AAA), Children's Fund Afghanistan (CFA), Solidarité Afghanistan Belgique (SAB), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), National Humanitarian Juvenile Afghanistan (NHJA), and Afghanistan Rehabilitation and Educational Programs (AREP).

The evaluator visited six D&R project sites in three provinces (Balkh, Jawzjan, and Faryab) in the northern region. In one D&R project site (Sheberghan in Jawzjan Province), CSWAC had already graduated, while the program was currently active in another five sites in Balkh and Faryab Provinces. In these six sites, he interviewed 46 former CS and 59 WAC (55 girls and 4 boys) who either graduated from the reintegration program or are still in the program, and he discussed the program and the children's progress with 44 men and 4 women who are members

of district-level community committees that monitor the program in their respective localities. All of these meetings, interviews, and site visits are listed in an annex.

Unfortunately, both security considerations and lack of time limited the evaluator's ability to talk with more NGOs and to personally visit more sites and talk with more of the children/youth and community leaders who had personally experienced the program. Earlier drafts of the itinerary had included visits to Kandahar, Khost, and Ghazni provinces, but security precautions about road travel and infrequent UN flights resulted in his visiting only the three northern provinces.

He interviewed two other key informants who provided important information about programs in which they had participated. One had directed part of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program for adult soldiers, which was run through the Afghanistan New Beginnings Program (ANBP); he had interacted briefly with the UNICEF D&R project in one region. The other had worked with the Agency for Rehabilitation & Energy Conservation in Afghanistan (AREA), the national NGO that implemented UNICEF's nationwide demobilization program, and he had directed that demobilization work for AREA.

V ORGANIZATION OF THE D&R PROJECT

It is helpful to review the organization of the project before discussing any of the questions that were voiced concerning the design of the project, any of the problems that arose during the project's implementation, and the findings and conclusions from this evaluation.

5.1 THE DEMOBILIZATION PROCESS

Demobilization was the first process, followed by reintegration. The original plan was that the DDR program for adult soldiers would demobilize all soldiers but reintegrate only adults. During the demobilization process, the DDR program would identify the soldiers who were CS and, after demobilizing them, refer them to UNICEF for reintegration.

The first step in demobilization was identifying the soldiers to be demobilized and reintegrated. This step was organized by UNAMA and the ANBP as part of the overall DDR program. In each of Afghanistan's eight regions, a Regional Verification Committee (RVC) was constituted to identify the soldiers in that region. The committee consisted of a TGIRA representative, an ANBP representative, and three elders from that region. The RVC met with the commanders in that region, obtained lists from the commanders of their soldiers, and verified the identity of those soldiers with local communities and leaders. This identification and verification process was also supposed to identify the soldiers who were CS. The effectiveness and accuracy of these RVCs in identifying CS have been questioned, and it is understood that the lists they prepared were only approximations.

The next step was for a Mobile Demobilization Documentation Team (MDDT) to arrive in a province. The arrival of the MDDT was advertised, as was a call for all soldiers in the province to present themselves to the MDDT for processing. The MDDT interviewed each person, verified whether that person was indeed a soldier and entitled to reintegration benefits, gave each person a medical checkup, and then issued an identification card to each soldier. The MDDT used the RVC list as a starting point, but it rapidly became apparent that the MDDT had to become the unit that actually verified who was and who was not a soldier.

As it turned out, the DDR program and the D&R project shared only the first step. They both used the same RVCs to produce regional lists of soldiers and CS. After that, DDR and D&R followed separate paths. The DDR program and the D&R project established separate MDDTs. The DDR program demobilized only adults, while the D&R project demobilized only the CS. If the DDR program discovered that one of the soldiers going through its demobilization process was under 18, that CS was supposed to be referred to UNICEF for reintegration. Similarly, if the D&R project learned that one of its CS was actually 18 or older, he was turned over to the DDR program for reintegration. In all, the D&R project demobilized 7,444 CS around the country.

Demobilization in the D&R project occurred in two phases. The first phase began in December 2003 and was completed by January 2005 (14 months). During this phase, 4,121 CS were demobilized in 17 provinces:

- Four provinces in the northeast region
- Four in the east region
- Seven in the central region
- One in the central highlands region
- One in the northern region

Demobilization was completed in 16 of these provinces during this phase, but only in part of one province (Nuristan) in the east region.

The organization of this phase was complex, as UNICEF was coordinating the work of one national and six international NGOs. NGOs and their assignments included the following:

- The national NGO (AREA) was responsible for organizing LDRCs in six provinces in the east and north, as well as staffing and operating the MDDTs.
- United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) was responsible for organizing Local Demobilization and Reintegration Committees (LDRCs) in six provinces in the central region.
- CFA was responsible for organizing LDRCs in four provinces in the northeast.
- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) was responsible for organizing LDRCs in one province in the central highlands.
- Save the Children-Sweden (SC-S) was responsible for organizing LDRCs in one province in the east.
- Save the Children-United Kingdom was responsible for organizing LDRCs in two provinces in the north.
- International Medical Corps (IMC) provided mobile medical teams to accompany the MDDTs.

5.2 LOCAL DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION COMMITTEES

Recognizing the problems with the lists provided by the RVCs, UNICEF selected one national and five international NGOs to work in provinces at provincial and district levels to form Local Demobilization and Reintegration Committees (LDRCs). The LDRCs were composed of local leaders, including the local mullah (religious leader of the local mosque), elders, and other

influential people. The NGOs identified and recruited the members of the LDRCs and then educated them about children's rights, the D&R project, and the importance to local children of demobilization and the subsequent reintegration program.

Then the LDRCs, assisted by the NGOs, had the task of identifying and registering the CS in their area. This task included talking with the commanders of the various fighting forces and encouraging them to release the children/youth under their commands. These LDRCs were a critical and essential component of the entire D&R project because only the local elders and leaders had the authority and security to negotiate successfully with local commanders and the local knowledge to identify, or verify the identity of, local children/youth as soldiers.

UNICEF worked with the selected NGO in each province to establish the LDRCs before the AREA MDDT arrived. Approximately one or two weeks were required in most provinces for the LDRCs to be recruited and for them to identify and register the CS. Once the mobile teams arrived, the CS in each district were demobilized in one or two days.

The following two tables show the number of CS demobilized in each province and the number (and percentage) of CS in each province who had some formal education. A child/youth was considered to have some formal education if he had attended any primary school, secondary school, or *madrassa* (religious) school. The issue of education will be discussed later.

Table 1: Child Soldiers Demobilized in the First Period (December 2003 to January 2005)

Province (Region)	No. of Child Soldiers Demobilized	No. of Children/Youth with Some Education*
Badakhshan (Northeast)	155	62 (40%)
Baghlan (Northeast)	348	11 (3%)
Balkh (Northern)	123	3 (2%)
Bamyan (Central Highland)	620	53 (9%)
Kabul (Central)	278	11 (4%)
Kapisa (Central)	271	13 (5%)
Kunar (East)	244	57 (23%)
Kunduz (Northeast)	267	82 (31%)
Laghman (East)	236	28 (12%)
Logar (Central)	233	41 (18%)
Nangarhar (East)	293	35 (12%)
Nuristan (East)	36	1 (3%)
Parwan—Panjsher (Central)	290	9 (3%)

Province (Region)	No. of Child Soldiers Demobilized	No. of Children/Youth with Some Education*
Paktia (Central)	267	17 (6%)
Takhar (Northeast)	303	78 (26%)
Wardak (Central)	157	9 (6%)
Total 17 provinces**	4,121 child soldiers	510 (12%) educated

* Of the 510 children with some education, 63 percent had some primary, 25 percent had some *madrassa*, and 13 percent had some secondary education.

** There are 17 provinces because Panjsher used to be included in Parwan Province. Nuristan is counted here, but only part of the province was covered in the first period.

There was a short pause of approximately three months between the first and second phases of demobilization in order to allow the reintegration program to catch up to demobilization. The organization of the second phase of demobilization was simpler and much faster with one NGO (AREA) and UNICEF handling everything (LDRCs and MDDTs). The second phase began in July 2005 and was completed by October 2005 (three months). Another 3,355 CS were demobilized, and demobilization was completed in 17 provinces:

- Four provinces in the west region
- Four in the northern region
- Five in the south region
- Three in the southeast region
- The rest of Nuristan Province (east region)

Table 2: Child Soldiers Demobilized in the Second Period (July 2002 to October 2005)

Province (Region)	No. of Underage/Child Soldiers Demobilized	No. of Children/Youth with Some Education*
Badghis (West)	140	17 (12%)
Farah (West)	121	1 (1%)
Faryab (North)	280	7 (3%)
Ghazni (Central)	205	4 (2%)
Ghor (West)	90	8 (9%)
Herat (West)	119	15 (13%)
Hilmund (South)	329	31 (9%)
Jawzjan (North)	123	4 (3%)
Kandahar (South)	363	39 (11%)
Khost (Central)	172	26 (15%)

Province (Region)	No. of Underage/Child Soldiers Demobilized	No. of Children/Youth with Some Education*
Nimruz (South)	178	28 (16%)
Nuristan (East)	251	2 (1%)
Paktika (Central)	251	5 (2%)
Samangan (North)	142	15 (11%)
Sari Pul (North)	134	7 (5%)
Uruzgan (South)	155	3 (2%)
Zabul (South)	302	74 (25%)
Total 17 provinces**	3,355 child soldiers	286 (9%) educated

* Of the 286 children with some education, 84 percent had some primary, 6 percent had some *madrassa*, and 9 percent had some secondary education.

** There are 17 provinces because a part of Nuristan was included in the second period.

UNICEF's intent was to implement the D&R project in every province. Demobilization did take place in every province, but reintegration has been restricted by security concerns to 29 provinces. Another province was recently created in the central region to make a total of 34 provinces in 2007. Reintegration had already occurred in the province from which the new province was separated.

5.3 THE REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

The three major components of the reintegration program were—

- Literacy and numeracy education
- Psychosocial education and activities
- Vocational education and equipment

In addition, a mobile medical team was attached to the reintegration program in each province. The team visited the families, performed medical exams and checkups on the participants, and provided basic health care.

Literacy and numeracy education consisted of a nine-month course that used the government's (MOE) official nine-month literacy curriculum. The government required that students attend two hours of literacy training a day, six days a week. UNICEF required that literacy be taught three hours a day, six days a week. Depending on the province, the course was taught in either Dari or Pashto, the two national languages. The textbooks for literacy in Dari or Pashto were a three-volume set that was provided by the MOE. Literacy teachers preferably had at least a grade 12 education, although that was not always possible.

Psychosocial education and activities included lessons in what are called “life skills” in Afghanistan and the encouragement of children to play team sports and games. Forming youth clubs and sports teams and providing sports equipment were important components of the psychosocial support program. The life skills curriculum consisted of chapters in the literacy textbooks that were taught as part of the literacy program. The life skills chapters covered a wide range of topics, including Afghan history and geography, health and personal hygiene, human rights, respect for others, agriculture, natural resource management, nutrition, and mine awareness.

Vocational education usually consisted of a nine-month course or apprenticeship period. Vocational options were offered in each province. Each child selected and was then trained for nine months in one vocation. At the end of the vocational course, the program provided each graduate with a toolkit or, for those who chose agriculture or animal husbandry, a selection of livestock and seeds.

The choice of which vocational skills would be taught in each district was decided by the NGO. The decision relied on a national labor market survey and on the recommendations of local leaders and members of the *shura*. Vocational education teachers were local craftsmen who knew their trade, but did not have to be formally educated. Vocational training for the boys often took place at the craftsman’s place of business and sometimes was similar to an apprenticeship. Vocational training for girls took place in a house, either the teacher’s house or one rented from or donated by a *shura* member.

Boys and girls could choose between agriculture (including livestock, poultry, and beekeeping) and skilled crafts. Boys had a wider range of skills to choose from, usually including carpentry and one or more forms of mechanics, often including tailoring, and occasionally electricity, computer repair, and other options. The mechanics might include repairing bicycles, motorcycles, generators, or water pumps. The choices for girls were usually limited to tailoring (including embroidery) and carpet-weaving, skills that could be practiced at home after the girls graduated. Almost all of the vocational training programs were supposed to require four hours of instruction a day, six days a week. When boys or girls chose agriculture or animal husbandry, they probably received fewer hours of formal training.

NGO reports covering 9,400 children showed that the most common vocational choices were agriculture (including livestock, poultry, and beekeeping) and tailoring (including embroidery). Over one-third of all children chose agriculture (35 percent), which was more favored by boys (42 percent) than by girls (22 percent). Similarly, more than a third of all children (37 percent) chose tailoring, which was the overwhelming choice for girls (70 percent), but still popular for boys (21 percent).

Each child spent approximately 10–12 months in the reintegration process. The first month was spent organizing and preparing the children, their families, the teachers, and the communities. Nine months were occupied by the training. During these nine months, the child was spending six full days a week in the program, since attending both the literacy and vocational sessions meant six to eight hours a day in classes. After completing the classes, one to two months were spent organizing and distributing the toolkits or livestock and preparing for the formal

graduation. There was a formal public graduation ceremony, often attended by representatives from UNICEF, MOLSAMD, and MOE, at which time the graduates received their certificates.

In each district, all of the CS and WAC who were selected for the reintegration program went through the 9–12 month process at the same time. Similarly, in each province, all of the districts went through the 9–12 month process at the same time. The D&R project did not fund any post-graduation activities or tracking of graduates, so graduation marked the termination of the D&R project in those districts and that province.

5.4 ESTABLISHING REINTEGRATION

The D&R project started its reintegration program in mid-2004 in the most secure provinces in the northeast and central regions. In 2005, the program started in the east, continued in the central, and then started in the western region. In 2006, the program started in the north and continued in the central region. The reintegration program has been completed in 24 provinces and will be completed in another four in July 2007. Reintegration started this year (February 2007) in one province (Kandahar) in the southern region. Four provinces in the southern region have not received the reintegration program. The USDOL-UNICEF project is scheduled to end in December 2007 when the Kandahar reintegration program is completed.

No single NGO was responsible for reintegration nationwide. UNICEF contracted with 18 international and national NGOs to implement the reintegration program. Reintegration was organized by province with 10 NGOs implementing the project in only one province each, six NGOs implementing in two provinces each, one NGO implementing in three provinces, and one NGO implementing in four provinces. A chart showing the chronological development of the reintegration program and the provinces covered by each NGO is attached (Annex 3).

UNICEF had to select an NGO to implement the project in each province. Some of the criteria used to select NGOs were general to any contracting situation, while others were more specific to this case. The capacities of an NGO to produce an attractive, professional proposal in English, administer a project, and account for funding were general criteria. The NGO should have had prior experience operating in the province and developing a relationship with districts and local communities. This prior establishment of working relationships is helpful anywhere in the world, but was especially important in this situation because of security concerns.

It was advantageous when an NGO had prior experience with and was committed to local-level community development or community mobilization, education, and children/youth. It was anticipated, although not essential, that the NGO also had a longer term commitment to the province and the specific districts and would continue its own programs there after completing the D&R project.

Security concerns were critical in many provinces and districts and affected the choice of NGOs, as well as the hiring of staff and operation of the program. International NGOs and their international staff were often inhibited from working with, or even visiting, many districts and provinces where local staff and national NGOs were able to visit and establish working

relationships. In some insecure localities, even the directors of national NGOs were restricted from visiting and supervising their locally hired staff.

Within each province, the choice of districts where reintegration would be implemented was based on the location of CS. CS were a rural phenomenon in Afghanistan, and the reintegration program was established in those districts where there were concentrations of CS. The D&R reintegration program also included a large number of WAC, selected by the local committee, and an effort was made to establish gender parity among these. Sometimes the WAC lived in the same districts as the CS, but at other times, the WAC were located closer to or in the district capitals. This was especially true for the female WAC, as there was more resistance in the rural areas to educating girls or allowing them to leave their homes to participate in training programs.

Once the districts were selected, based on the location of the demobilized CS, the NGO that was implementing reintegration in that province would begin meeting with local leaders in each district to establish district-level community-based committees. This committee has been given different names: LDRC, Reintegration Committee, Child Well-Being Committee, Child-Enabling Committee, Child Protection Committee, or *shura*. To distinguish this district-level committee from the regional (RVC) and provincial committees (LDRCs) that were described earlier, the district-level committee will be called the *shura* in this report.

The *shura* was a crucial component of the reintegration program. Similar to the provincial-level LDRCs during demobilization, members of the district *shuras* already possessed local authority and knowledge. Acceptance and sponsorship of the D&R project by *shura* members permitted reintegration in places where insecurity would have doomed a foreign program. In the beginning, *shura* members also identified WAC for the program, and the *shura* operated throughout reintegration to encourage local participation in the program and to monitor the attendance and performance of the children/youth in the program.

Of course, there was always the temptation for *shura* members to put forward their relatives as WAC to receive the benefits of literacy and skills training. Different NGOs had different strategies and were more or less successful in thwarting this. The criteria were that WAC should be boys and girls who were especially disadvantaged. This included children—

- Who were orphans, or whose fathers had died.
- Whose parents were handicapped, or whose families had limited food.
- Who were engaged in hazardous work or were living/working in the street.
- Who were illiterate or with little education and were out of school.

Shura members often seemed to emphasize and choose those children who were more visible, which usually meant that they lived in or around the district capital.

As was noted earlier, gender parity was a priority with a general expectation that 50 percent of the WAC would be girls. Identification and recruitment of girls into reintegration was variable. CS were located in rural areas. When female WAC were identified, they were primarily located

closer to or in the district capital. This appeared to reflect the more conservative values of more rural areas, where families were more reluctant to allow girls to leave their homes for any reason, including attending classes.

Once the CS and WAC were identified, literacy teachers and trainers of vocational skills were selected, as well as social workers or counselors. The reintegration program required a permanent presence of teachers/trainers and social workers in the districts during the 10 to 12 months of the program. The literacy and vocational teachers and social workers in each province were recruited, trained, and paid by the NGO that implemented reintegration in that province. When an NGO hired MOE teachers for the literacy classes, the NGO paid the teachers for their extra class responsibilities.

The teachers and social workers were usually local people for several reasons. Security concerns were always a consideration. Local people who were already accepted in their communities might be the only people who could safely work there. Given cultural concerns about girls leaving their homes for classes, families were more likely to allow their girls to be educated by local teachers who were known and trusted by the parents. With vocational education, local craftsmen and women were more likely to recognize the characteristics of local markets and train the children to be more employable in those markets. Another factor was transportation and cost, since the NGOs did not compensate local workers for transportation costs.

The advantages of hiring local teachers and social workers were balanced by the fact that local people did not always have the appropriate level of skills or education. UNICEF responded to this by providing social work training for some social workers and literacy training for some literacy teachers. In addition, about half of the NGOs noted that they also provided pre-service and in-service training for their local hires. The evaluator was unable to assess the quality of instruction and services given across the country.

NGOs made various arrangements for classrooms. In many districts, literacy classes were taught in private homes, which was especially true for the girls' literacy and vocational classes because their families did not want them to be taught in a public place. Sometimes the use of the homes was donated by the homeowners, but in other districts, the program rented the space. In some districts, the program used classrooms in public schools, and in a few districts, the NGOs used their own training centers.

In the beginning, the reintegration program encountered difficulties in encouraging families to allow their children to attend classes. With girls, this lack of encouragement was commonly due to cultural reasons; with boys, the reasons were more often economic. One of the NGOs explained this by saying that there were two types of families. Wealthier families did not need their children's income and supported their children being educated with the expectation that the children would then be able to have better incomes in the future. Poorer families needed their children to be working and providing some income for the families. These poorer families did not have the luxury of foregoing current income so that their children could have better jobs in the future.

By 2005, UNICEF had responded to this situation by reaching an agreement with the World Food Program (WFP) whereby WFP would provide food rations to the children in the reintegration program as long as they were attending classes. The food was intended to support the families, serving to replace the income that the children would have provided to their families if the children were working instead of attending classes. Providing food significantly improved attendance.

After graduation from the literacy program, some of the children/youth decided to attend regular school. Many of the NGOs reported up to a third of the children being accepted into the formal school system. Usually more boys than girls intended to continue in school. Other children, especially girls, wanted to attend school, but were unable to receive their parents' permission. The evaluator could not learn how many of the children continued in school because there was no formal system to monitor or track children after they left the D&R project.

Other children, including the majority of the former CSs, decided to enter the workforce immediately. Many boys have opened their own shops or have become employed. Almost all of the girls who are working do so in their homes. The evaluator was unable to estimate the proportion of graduates who are currently unemployed or in formal school because neither UNICEF nor the NGOs have established a program to track graduates.

VI DEBATES ABOUT CHILD SOLDIER PROGRAMS

Presented below are three interrelated questions or criticisms that were not specifically noted in the Terms of Reference (TOR) of this evaluation, but have been raised in several internationally distributed reports. These criticisms are addressed in this report because the issues are fundamental to the design of any CS-related project; are relevant to OCFT; and have received much attention in background documents, especially in the Chrobok report that focuses on the demobilization and reintegration of CS in Afghanistan (Chrobok, 2005; Rossi and Giustozzi, 2006; Thruelsen, 2006). Although the documents refer only to UNICEF's decisions and actions, the criticisms are relevant to OCFT because they raise questions about whether OCFT should fund separate programs for CS.

1. First issue: Coordinating versus separating D&R from DDR

One basic issue was the separation of UNICEF's D&R project from the nationwide DDR program for adult soldiers. Here the question was why UNICEF decided that the D&R project should operate independently from the DDR program. A closely related criticism concerned the importance of coordinating post-conflict activities and noted the lack of coordination and communication between the two programs. This lack of communication was noted especially because other UN agencies (UNDP, UNAMA, and WFP) directed or were directly involved in the ANBP and DDR program.

2. Second issue: Definition and treatment of CS

Two closely related questions were whether there were enough significant differences between CS and adult soldiers to merit separate programs, and whether the number of real CS had been inflated by including other children who were not really soldiers.

3. Third issue: Special treatment for CS versus WAC

Another basic issue was whether CS should receive special treatment or simply be considered part of the general WAC category. Apparently a number of NGOs objected to UNICEF's sponsoring a project that focused on CS. Their perspective was that many children/youth in Afghanistan were affected by warfare and poverty, and any available resources should address the entire WAC population without any special treatment for CS (Chrobok, 2005).

6.1 DISCUSSION ABOUT SEPARATING D&R FROM DDR AND THE DEFINITION AND TREATMENT OF CS

It seems clear that UNICEF's intent from 2002 into mid-2003 was to coordinate the D&R for CS with the DDR program for adults, or have the D&R constitute a subprogram under the umbrella of the DDR program. This intent is clearly expressed in UNICEF's report on its March–June 2003 rapid assessment of the extent and distribution of CS in Afghanistan.

“The DDR process is an integral part of the national post conflict recovery strategy and is intended to include child soldiers as part of the overall DDR framework.”

As was stated earlier, both DDR and D&R used the same RVCs, and it had been anticipated that DDR would handle the demobilization of CS.

Sometime later in 2003 there was a separation of D&R from DDR. In its December 2003 report to USDOL, UNICEF noted that one of the problems it encountered in implementing the project was the expectation that the necessary vehicles and photo identification equipment would be provided by the DDR program. Now that that was not going to happen, UNICEF needed to find additional funding.

The evaluator does not know the exact reasons for the administrative and operational separation of D&R from DDR, but other authors have provided their analysis (Chrobok, 2005:28–30; Thruelsen, 2006:29). The simplest explanation was that there were too few CS for the ANBP to think they merited any special treatment. An alternate explanation was that there were personality differences between the ANBP and UNICEF people.

A more detailed explanation was that there was a disagreement between UNICEF and ANBP over whether (1) the CS merited separate treatment or should go through the same DDR as adults and whether (2) only those children/youth who had been actively involved in combat deserved to be treated as soldiers. The issues involved in the detailed explanation need to be explored.

The ANBP position was that only those children/youth who had carried guns were really CS, and CS should be treated the same as adult soldiers. Afghan culture had become a gun culture, and youths carrying guns were common and culturally accepted. Another cultural feature was that youths were considered to have stopped being children and to have become adults before they reached 18. One sign was the appearance of facial hair (beards) on boys. These boys were really adults and should be treated as such.

The ANBP position also relied on the fact that CS in Afghanistan differed in important ways from CS in Africa. In general, Afghan CS were not as alienated from their communities, and the degree of reintegration that was required in Afghanistan was very different than that found in most African situations. Almost all of the CS in Afghanistan had served in what could be called a home guard. Although they may have become rude and disrespectful, they had continued to live at home and remain integrated in their villages and districts. Some of the CS had been abused, and some had been removed from their communities to serve on front lines elsewhere, but the majority remained with their families and in their communities. Reintegration in the D&R project really referred to providing children with some psychosocial counseling and activities and an educational and vocational head start to a better future.

In most African situations, to the contrary, many CS had been alienated from their families and home villages, often by forced participation in violent acts, and geographically separated. During their time with the fighting forces, many CS experienced brutal scenes and brutal treatment. Both boys and girls were recruited, often voluntarily, but sometimes forcibly. Many of the girls were abused sexually, were considered unmarriageable after demobilization, and usually had to resort

to prostitution. When CS were demobilized, it was usually at some distance from their homes. Although many were accepted back into their families, others were not and never will be.

If the reason for the separation really was this disagreement between UNICEF and ANBP over the status and treatment of CS, UNICEF's position was obvious, as should be OCFT's position. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child established the principle that everyone under 18 was a child, and that children had rights and should be treated as children. The Cape Town Principles established a universal position on CS—all children (defined as all people under 18) associated in any way with the fighting forces are to be considered to be CS, since, to some extent, all have been militarized and alienated from civil society (see Hansen, 2005). For UNICEF to agree with the ANBP position would be to negate the Optional Protocol and the Cape Town Principles, both of which are seen as major achievements in the struggle to establish more protection for children.

Another way to assess this issue is to review the goals of demobilization and reintegration for different populations. The goals of DDR programs for adult soldiers are to withdraw weapons from circulation and dissolve the armed groups. Disarmament is an important goal, and this was never seen as particularly relevant to CS. Dissolving the armed groups is not accomplished by simply demobilizing the soldiers, as they may be quickly remobilized to reconstitute the same armed groups. From this perspective, the primary objective of reintegration is to cement demobilization by dissolving the socioeconomic relationship between soldier and commander. This may be accomplished by adding additional benefits as the soldier remains a civilian and extending the period of time in which the former soldier is engaged in training programs. Successful reintegration is when former soldiers do not remobilize as soldiers or turn into bandits. The welfare of the former soldiers is really of little concern.

UNICEF and OCFT have child protection mandates and a children's rights orientation. The demobilization and reintegration of CS have a humanitarian goal. Welfare is primary. The purpose is to reestablish the child's social relationships, provide the child with a more normal childhood experience, perhaps by returning to school, and hopefully provide the child with some means of earning a living, either immediately or after completing his or her education.

The discussion thus far brings out some obvious reasons why UNICEF continued to press for a separate D&R project for CS and why OCFT should continue to fund CS-related projects.

Whether or not this was obvious at the time, there appears to be another, country-specific reason why it was important for the D&R project to remain separate from the DDR program. Apparently, the DDR program was heavily politicized with a bias toward specific regions and factions that controlled the Ministry of Defense (Rossi and Giustozzi, 2006:5-6; Thruelsen, 2006). It was important for the CS project to maintain a distance from a politicized DDR program if the D&R project wanted to be accepted throughout rural Afghanistan.

A related criticism concerned the importance of coordinating post-conflict activities. Without addressing the substance or merits of DDR or D&R, the criticism simply stated that—

- Coordination was important.

- The two programs (DDR and D&R) were not coordinated.
- Coordination was particularly noteworthy because UN agencies were directing both programs.

The criticism is valid in that coordination is always important, and there seems to have been a lack of coordination between the DDR and D&R programs. However, there are three points that need to be raised.

First, the DDR and D&R programs had many differences. As has been shown, they had different goals and differed in their military significance and politicization. The DDR program first focused on both disarmament and demobilization, both of which were militarily and politically important. The D&R project did not include disarmament and was never considered essential to the war-to-peace process. Reintegration in the DDR program was always seen in terms of dissolving the fighting forces, whereas reintegration and children's welfare were the central focus of the D&R project. True to its mission, the DDR program dealt only with soldiers, while the D&R project included both CS and approximately as many WAC who were not CS.

The two programs also differed in scale and sources of funding. DDR anticipated disarming and demobilizing up to 100,000 soldiers and ended by demobilizing more than 63,300. The D&R project anticipated demobilizing 8,000 CS and demobilized approximately 7,500. Japan contributed approximately two-thirds of the US\$141 million cost of the DDR program, with the rest coming from other western countries. The USDOL contributed more than 40 percent of the US\$7 million (estimated) cost of the D&R project, with the rest coming primarily from UNICEF-related western charities.

Second, each of these efforts (DDR and D&R) was administratively complex and required a lot of effort and attention to coordinate the internal organization. Even though the DDR program was more complex in terms of the number of international and national partners and the multitude of vested interests jockeying for position and influence, the D&R project was also complex in terms of the relationships among UNICEF, 20 NGOs that were implementing partners, GTIRA ministries at both national and provincial levels, and communities. Coordinating the D&R project itself required much time and attention.

Third, although coordination among agencies is important, there comes a time when people on the ground have to choose between attending another coordination meeting or getting some of their own work done. Skilled administrators are always in short supply. Their time and attention are scarce resources, but this scarcity is not always appreciated by outside observers. The terms "ideal" and "ideally" appear frequently in the critical reports, which appear to be evaluating performance based on ideal standards that do not account for or give credit to the on-the-ground realities of allocating scarce administrative resources.

6.2 DISCUSSION ABOUT SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR CS VERSUS WAC

The general question is whether CS deserve any special treatment. This issue was discussed earlier in terms of the ANBP viewpoint that CS should be treated the same as other soldiers, and the UNICEF position was described in terms of child's rights and international standards. This section discusses a contrary argument in which child-oriented NGOs argued that—

- Many or almost all of Afghanistan's children were war-affected (almost all were WAC).
- CS did not really need more assistance than other WAC.
- CS should be placed within a more inclusive WAC category without any special treatment.

Another way in which the proposed UNICEF D&R project differed from the DDR program was that the D&R project was not exclusively for CS, included approximately the same number of WAC who were not CS, and tried to achieve a gender balance among the WAC. This differentiation meant that the D&R project was not exclusively for the benefit of CS or boys.

Nonetheless, the criticism raised by the NGOs was that the CS category should not be singled out for assistance, but should be lumped together with other WAC. A related question would be whether OCFT should have funded a project that specified CS in Afghanistan.

This argument has been raised in other countries that have been devastated by warfare and where many children are severely deprived of education and employment. Usually the argument is made because separate D&R programs are established that benefit only CS, and stakeholders want the programs to be opened to admit WAC, as well.

This argument may be further extended against WAC as well as CS. An extreme example of this occurred in 2001 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when the UN decided that the terrible and widespread impacts on children of the years of warfare had essentially eliminated the significance of the distinction between war-inflicted vulnerability and chronic vulnerability. This decision argued against paying special attention to just either WAC or CS.

The UN estimated that at least 50,000 children in the DRC in 2001 lived in “particularly difficult circumstances.” This very inclusive category included demobilized child soldiers, victimized girls, unaccompanied children, orphans, physically handicapped or chronically ill children, and street children. In that situation, the UN and most international NGOs in the DRC preferred to focus their child-welfare programs on this broad category. They argued that all children living in desperate situations deserved to be helped, and the NGOs did not feel that they could (or should) refuse to help desperately needy children just because they did not fit into a targeted category (CS or WAC).

The NGOs in Afghanistan in 2003 were not arguing to eliminate the WAC category, simply to consider CS as a subcategory of WAC without any special privileged access to assistance. The evaluator does not know the arguments that UNICEF used in 2003 to this criticism, but this is a logical place to discuss some of the pros and cons of maintaining the CS as a separate category.

First, although embedded within a humanitarian context, D&R was still part of a general process of demobilizing and dissolving armed forces. The CS, whether or not they had carried arms, constituted part of the military groups that the government and international sponsors were trying to dissolve. This membership was a security issue that should not have been ignored.

Second, (this issue was raised earlier in this report) the definition and recommended treatment of CS has been clearly stated in the Cape Town Principles. If UNICEF, OCFT, or the NGOs were to decide to make an exception in Afghanistan, they would be negating and opposing a major international standard and statement for children's rights.

The targeted focus on CS has caused problems in other countries that used a different approach to D&R programs. The approach that was used in these other countries was to target only the CS for assistance and to have a separate reintegration program for them. This approach segregated CS from other children throughout the re-entry and training period instead of using that time to start reintegrating CS with other children and youths. Also, by providing benefits only to CS, that approach sent the wrong message to parents and communities. The wrong message was that their children should mobilize the next time that hostilities erupted in order to become eligible for a reintegration package of benefits.

VII PROBLEMS

This evaluation recognizes that there were many problems in designing, organizing, implementing, and coordinating the components of the D&R project and coordinating with other programs, including DDR. Over the four-year life of this nationwide D&R project, there were many problems, some of which were caused by UNICEF. However, most of the problems were not clearly controllable by UNICEF, and many seem to have been unavoidable given the conditions existing in Afghanistan during 2003–2007. Some of the problems were widespread and recurrent. Others were specific or episodic. Almost all of these problems were noted by UNICEF in its reports to USDOL or by the NGOs in their reports to UNICEF. The problems will be detailed later in this section, but presented below is a brief summary.

7.1 INSECURITY

Organizing a D&R project in a country that has been wracked by warfare; is not yet completely pacified; and in which local, provincial, and regional warlords are jockeying for power is a complex undertaking. Safety and security are major concerns and are further complicated when the project occurs in a country that has been politically extremely anti-western and relatively closed to western and UN influence. These circumstances meant that neither UNICEF nor international NGOs had much on-the-ground experience working in many provinces and districts and had not been able to establish trusting relationships with communities. Exacerbating this was the religious, social, and cultural conservatism that restricted girls' education and movements outside the home and, on a much broader front, resulted in a suspicion and mistrust of outside, "western" initiatives.

The country's insecurity directly affected the implementation of the reintegration program. NGOs considered it too dangerous to implement the program in four provinces, which is why the project has reached only 29. Even within those 29, NGOs have been unable to work in various districts, and implementation was delayed or temporarily suspended in different districts. A specific example of this was in Badghis Province in August 2006, when the office of another NGO was attacked and two people were killed. The reintegration program in that district had to be closed and replaced by work in another district.

7.2 DELAYS

The primary recurring problem was delay. Some of the delays were caused by bad planning. Others were caused by inexperience on the part of UNICEF and the NGOs, particularly the international NGOs that often form the backbone of internationally funded programs. This inexperience included organizational inexperience in how to organize D&R and the lack of agency and staff (personal) experience establishing relationships and working with local people in specific provinces and districts.

The original organization of demobilization (the first phase) was too complex and resulted in delays. Nationwide demobilization of CS was not completed until October 2005. By the time that the D&R project reached some provinces, some CS had already been remobilized (re-recruited), emigrated, or became difficult to locate.

Reintegration took a long time to establish. It often took months for UNICEF to select NGOs to implement reintegration in specific provinces. UNICEF wanted to select NGOs that had a commitment to children's rights and education, an orientation toward community-based work, on-the-ground experience with local communities in the specific province, and the ability to work in insecure areas. To a great extent, the delays in choosing NGOs reflected the relative absence of on-the-ground experience by international NGOs. This issue also highlighted the problem that national NGOs often have the on-the-ground experience and confidence of the local people, but have difficulties competing with international NGOs in writing proposals and reports in English and in keeping appropriate financial records for auditing.

After being selected, some international NGOs took months to organize, to hire local or recruit international staff, or to subcontract implementation of the reintegration program to national NGOs. This delay resulted in a gap of months, occasionally up to a year, between the demobilization and the start of the reintegration program in a province.

7.3 REACHING REMOTE SITES

Another serious problem was inherent in the purpose and design of the project. The reintegration training sites were supposed to be located where CS lived, which proved difficult and sometimes impossible for security, logistical, or budgetary reasons. In some districts, the CS lived in areas where the NGO staff would not be secure. In other districts, CS did not live closely together. When the CS were scattered widely over a rural area, the NGOs could not afford to establish a multitude of small training programs and hire local staff close to every CS, which meant that some CS did not participate in reintegration because it was too difficult for them to reach the training site six days a week.

In some provinces, the NGO established a workable solution by setting up living quarters for CS who lived too far away to commute daily to classes. However, in some provinces, it appeared that an international NGO was not really committed to extending the reintegration program to reach the CS, but settled for the easier option of fewer, more centralized training sites. This situation highlighted again the trade-off between selecting a national NGO that was more likely to be able to reach farther and less secure CS, and an international NGO that had other strengths but was less capable (or less willing) to reach into more isolated or less secure locations.

7.4 FUNDING

Funding was another problem at different levels. The original budgets did not cover the expenses incurred by UNICEF or NGOs. As noted earlier, UNICEF originally expected the DDR program to provide transportation and equipment for the MDDTs. When that did not happen, more funding was needed. As it turned out, UNICEF estimates that the final cost of the D&R project was approximately US\$7 million. USDOL provided US\$3 million, but UNICEF also needed funding from other governments (Japan, the Netherlands, and Canada), national committees for UNICEF (in Germany, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom), as well as its own internal funds.

NGOs experienced funding problems, as well. One of the recurring issues concerned vocational training. There was a set cost per participant that was supposed to cover the training as well as the toolkit that was given to each graduate. NGOs complained that the budget covered some classes, but certain trades cost more. For example, the budget covered the costs for tailoring classes, but not for equipping graduates of blacksmith classes. Similarly, the purchasing program for livestock for the graduates of agriculture or animal husbandry classes could use more funding. There was an important difference between those international and larger national NGOs that had financial reserves or could call on other donors, and those smaller national NGOs that had few reserves and really relied on the D&R budget to cover all of the expenses of implementing reintegration. These were the ones that suffered the most when there were delays in disbursing funds.

7.5 NEEDING CHILDREN'S INCOME

Many families did not permit their children (CS and WAC) to attend reintegration classes because the families wanted or needed the income that the children produced. UNICEF responded to this economic issue by arranging with WFP to provide food to the CSWAC families as long as their children attended classes. UNICEF and the NGOs thought that the food was necessary and, when it was provided, was effective in encouraging families to allow their children to participate in the classes.

UNICEF recommends that more attention be paid to family economic conditions in Afghanistan and that the families of targeted children be supported, which would enable the families to send their children to education/training. This support would require enhanced coordination with other donors that support poverty reduction programs. UNICEF believes that linking the families of child laborers with poverty reduction strategies, especially the micro-credit program that is funded by other donors, would better ensure long-term sustainability. UNICEF has started developing an intervention targeting both child laborers and their families in Torkham Border (on the border with Pakistan) in the eastern region. Negotiations are under way with micro-credit organizations to include the families of child laborers in their program.

7.6 WFP FOOD

The need for WFP food had not been anticipated, and there were problems coordinating the food request with WFP. Many of the reintegration programs did not receive food until partway through the reintegration program and only received four to six months of food. This delay impacted attendance and also caused other problems for the NGOs. Communities lost trust in the NGOs when the NGOs kept promising food that did not arrive. Also, whenever there are problems in distributing food or other relief materials, rumors abound that the distributing agency is stealing or diverting supplies.

7.7 APPROPRIATENESS OF LITERACY EDUCATION

Another problem concerned the literacy program, which was not appropriate for some CSWAC who already had some education. As noted earlier in the tables about demobilized CS, more than 10 percent of the CS had some prior education. For 70 percent of those with prior schooling, that

meant some primary school. For another 18 percent, it meant some *madrassa* schooling. For 12 percent, it meant they had some secondary schooling. Note that 12 percent of those with some education meant 1 percent of all CS. The literacy program was certainly inappropriate for those with some secondary schooling and probably inappropriate for most of the others with prior schooling, as well. (However, the evaluator interviewed some CS in the DRC who had some previous schooling, but had forgotten everything while serving as soldiers. They needed to restart their education with a literacy program that acted as a refresher course that facilitated their transition into formal schooling.)

The literacy program was a good idea for the majority, for whom literacy was important and empowering. Almost 90 percent of the CS were illiterate with no education. The prior education of the WAC was not recorded, but illiteracy was one of the main criteria for selecting WAC, so all or the great majority of WAC were undoubtedly illiterate. Some of the literacy classes were vehicles for life skills material that was useful for everyone, but the program should not have required already-literate CSWAC to sit through literacy classes without providing some added enrichment.

The project was aware of this issue but faced major logistical problems in setting up any separate educational program for the small number of children with prior education who were scattered in remote districts and villages. For example, each province might average about 18 children with some level of literacy who lived in 6–10 districts. Each district might have only a few (two to three) of these beneficiaries. Setting up a separate program for these individuals would have been very challenging, expensive, and cost-ineffective. In addition, the MOE did not have a specific curriculum to cater to the needs of this specific category. The main D&R project support to this group of children was the provision of life skills and vocational education, recreation and psychosocial support, and medical services.

7.8 CLASS SIZE

The vocational educational programs had other problems. Some of these classes were too big. When classes were too big, the participants did not have as much individual attention and did not learn as much as other students in smaller classes. Almost all of the vocational classes had the students learning practical skills by working under the supervision and guidance of a skilled craftsman. One of the NGO directors noted that they had started with 20 students in a class but learned that this was too many. After that, when there were 20 students, the NGO split them into two sections (10 students each) that met the instructor at different times during the day.

7.9 RESTRICTIONS ON GIRLS

There are cultural restrictions on girls leaving their homes. The cultural inhibitions on girls had prevented the establishment of reintegration programs for girls in many districts, and these restrictions presented another problem when the girls who had participated in the reintegration program graduated. In many districts, the girls were not permitted to leave their homes, thus restricting the girls in marketing their skills. This restriction clearly limited most of the girls to the local markets.

7.10 TRACKING

The issue of success for graduates highlights the problem of not being able to confirm the longer term success or failure of reintegration. Neither UNICEF nor the NGOs continued to track the graduates in the succeeding months or years to assess the extent to which the graduates were successful in continuing their education, finding employment, or establishing their own businesses. This lack of tracking means was one way in which the situation in Afghanistan was similar to what happened in Africa. In neither area were the agencies funded to monitor graduates, and the agencies turned their attention to their next projects rather than paying any concentrated attention to the long-term impacts of previous programs.

Some NGOs continued to work in the same districts or provinces and learned, often anecdotally, what was happening with some of the graduates of their programs. Some NGOs also used some of their previous graduates to staff new projects or as participants in new programs. In none of these cases, however, was there a consistent tracking of graduates to be able to answer the question of longer term success or failure. Tracking would require additional funding (note the problem with the existing level of funding that was mentioned above).

7.11 DETERMINING AGE

Another widespread problem in Afghanistan is fundamental to any program that targets children. This was the problem of verifying whether a soldier or WAC was a child or an adult. How do observers determine a person's age in the absence of birth records and national identification cards and in cultures and societies that do not mark anyone's birthday? This problem became especially apparent during demobilization in Afghanistan and occurs frequently in other countries, as well. The D&R project attempted to deal with this by educating staff about local historical events that could be used in attempts to determine how big/mature an individual was when such-and-such an event happened. Another method was asking the doctor in the medical team that accompanied the MDDT to judge the age of a child/youth.

UNICEF is addressing this problem in its 2006–2008 country program. Using its own regular resources and funds received from Germany, UNICEF started supporting the Ministry of Interior in revitalizing the birth registration system in the country to ensure registration of each child immediately after birth. A pilot project started in 2007 in six major provinces (Kabul, Nangrahar, Herat, Kandahar, Mazar, and Kunduz). The project will be extended to cover all the remaining provinces in 2008 and 2009.

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VIII WITHDRAWAL, PREVENTION, RETENTION, AND COMPLETION

These are key concepts and common indicators for USDOL's evaluation. There was some difficulty in reconciling the concept of retention with the empirical situation, and there were some problems of withdrawal, retention, and measurement with the D&R project.

This section refers to detailed reintegration statistics that are attached to this report (Annex 4). The statistics are based on monthly and final reports from the 18 NGOs that implemented the reintegration program. Enrollment and completion statistics are broken down by gender (boy and girl) and, usually, by status (CS and WAC).

Most of the CS and WAC who were selected into the D&R project received the full benefit of the 10–12 months of the reintegration program. More than 11,400 children (11,479) received the full benefit, and a larger number (12,455 children) completed at least one or more components of the reintegration program. More than 7,500 boys (7,563), including both CS and WAC, completed the literacy and vocational programs. More than 3,900 girl WAC (3,916) completed the vocational education program, and more than 4,100 (4,186) completed the literacy program. The number of beneficiaries targeted by UNICEF (totaling 12,287) is also presented. Eight NGOs implemented the reintegration program in more than one province. In these cases, the data for the individual provinces are lumped into a total for that NGO.

8.1 CONCEPTS

There was no apparent difficulty in applying the concepts of withdrawal and prevention to the D&R project. CS were categorized as children engaged in hazardous work. Demobilizing them was clearly recognized as withdrawing them from such work. The criteria used by the project to select WAC were designed to recognize children at risk for engaging in exploitive or hazardous work. Enrolling these WAC in the educational reintegration programs prevented these children from becoming engaged in such work.

There was no conceptual difficulty in applying the concept of completion—the percentage of enrollees in an educational program who complete the program. There was some difficulty in actually measuring the rate of completion in some of the provinces, as will be explained below.

8.2 RETENTION

There were both conceptual and measurement problems with retention. Retention is supposed to measure the percentage of children enrolled in educational programs who continue in the program and are not engaged in hazardous child labor. However, the D&R project included more than educational programs.

There were three ways in which children could stop participating in (“drop out” from) the D&R project:

- CS who were demobilized by the D&R project might never become enrolled in the reintegration program. Did these CS who started in the project by being demobilized but never enrolled in the educational reintegration program count against retention? Were the demobilized CS who stayed with the project “retained” by the project?
- CS and WAC who were selected for reintegration but never came to classes, appeared only sporadically, or stopped before completing the nine-month courses. These are the obvious children (“drop outs”) to be counted against retention.
- CS and WAC who completed the reintegration program. After graduation, the D&R project had no connection with these children (i.e., they were not retained).

There was some misunderstanding between UNICEF and USDOL about how to interpret and record the “persistence” of children who completed the reintegration program. They counted in the accumulated statistics of completion, but did they also count in terms of retention? The project continued for some time to include these “completed” children as if they were retained. Eventually an understanding was reached that persistence applied only to children who re-enrolled and did not apply to the children who completed the reintegration program.

8.3 DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION

Many CS who were demobilized by the D&R project were not reintegrated by the project. The project noted that 7,444 CS were demobilized, while the earlier tables showed a total of 7,476. The minor discrepancy probably reflects the small number of CS who were identified by the adult DDR program.

Although 7,476 CS were demobilized, only around 6,000 were reintegrated by the project. The exact number of CS who were reintegrated is uncertain because four NGOs did not specify in their reports how many of the boys in their reintegration programs were CS versus WAC. Much of the difference between the number demobilized and the number reintegrated is because reintegration occurred only in 29 provinces and did not occur in four provinces where a total of 964 CS had been demobilized.

However, even in the majority of the 29 provinces where reintegration occurred, fewer CS were enrolled in reintegration programs than had been demobilized. NGOs consistently noted that they had problems identifying and finding some of the CS who were supposed to be in their districts. The demobilization lists did not prove to be completely accurate or helpful. Another consistently noted problem was that some of the CS had emigrated or had been displaced during the months of delay between demobilization and the beginning of reintegration.

Re-recruitment was noted as a problem by the first NGOs to implement reintegration, which usually interfered with enrolling CS in the reintegration program and helps explain why fewer were enrolled than were demobilized. Only one NGO (CFA) noted re-recruitment as the cause

for some 14 CS dropping out after they had started reintegration. In any case, re-recruitment meant that the CS had not been permanently withdrawn from the hazards of soldiering.

8.4 MEASUREMENT PROBLEMS

Problems with measuring completion and the retention of children who had enrolled in the reintegration program were as follows:

- The NGOs did not always break down the data on boys by status (CS versus WAC), so the total numbers of CS, boy WAC, and total WAC are incomplete.
- At least three NGOs (CFA, AREA, and HELP) enrolled more WAC than were targeted, which helps explain why many more girls completed the CFA and AREA programs than were listed as originally enrolled (770 compared to 401, or a completion rate of 192 percent for girls for those two NGOs).
- Three NGOs (BRAC, CFA, and CRS) noted significant differences between the number of children who completed the vocational education program and those who completed the literacy program. All three noted high losses of boys, while only one noted a significant loss of girls.
- Three NGOs (AREA, ADRA, and IOM) recorded small overall differences between the number originally targeted and the number completing reintegration, although the small overall change for AREA camouflaged a significant loss of boys by an increase in girls.

Completion rates varied through time and space. Twelve NGOs who implemented reintegration in 15 provinces reported 100 percent completion. All of the boys and girls who started the reintegration program in those provinces graduated from both the vocational and literacy courses. Another two NGOs (ADRA and IOM) implementing reintegration in another four provinces reported very high completion.

On the other hand, four NGOs (BRAC, CFA, AREA, and CRS) that were among the first to implement reintegration had serious problems retaining students through the 9–10 months of the literacy and vocational programs.

8.5 DROPPING OUT

Some children who enrolled and started the reintegration program were not retained by the program. This issue was more common for boys, as 976 boys (11 percent) dropped out. The most common reason mentioned for dropping out was that the child's family wanted/needed the child to work and provide some income to the family. Other reasons included the child/family emigrating or being displaced, and a few boys (14 were recorded) dropped out because they were recruited again into the militia.

The non-retention of girls is masked by the net increase in the number of girls completing the reintegration program. The increased number of girls is explained by the fact that three NGOs (CFA, AREA, and HELP) working in nine provinces agreed to accept more girl WAC, in addition to those enrolled in the D&R project. When boys dropped out, these extra girls moved into those slots in the program. Some of these additional girls did not complete the literacy program because they enrolled after the reintegration program had started.

IX VARIATION

The evaluation highlighted some areas where there was significant variation. The variable areas were not consistently successes or problems.

9.1 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS

The NGOs that implemented the reintegration program varied in many ways, some of which have been mentioned earlier. The variation presented advantages and disadvantages. There were some consistent differences between, on the one side, all international NGOs and, on the other side, all national NGOs. NGOs varied in their emphasis on and experience with children's rights, literacy and vocational education, community mobilization, and community-based projects. NGOs varied in their experience and their establishment of relationships with leaders and communities in specific provinces and, within those provinces, in specific districts.

A key issue in Afghanistan or any country is that bringing in and familiarizing international staff takes time and delays the implementation of a contract. In any insecure country, an international staff also creates additional security issues and, in comparison to national staff, is restricted in freedom of movement and access to localities. National NGOs and the national staff of international NGOs are more likely to have already-established relationships in provinces and to share cultural and social features that facilitate access to and activities within difficult-to-access provinces and districts. These advantages of national NGOs are clearly evident in the D&R project where a national NGO was the primary actor in demobilization and where national NGOs have established reintegration programs in provinces (for instance, Khost and Kandahar), which international NGOs cannot enter.

On the other hand, international NGOs usually have obvious advantages over most national NGOs in handling the administrative, financial (accountability), and reporting tasks of a U.S. government or UN contract or grant. The international NGOs have the advantage of experience with similar contracts; previous relationships with the donor; speaking (and writing) the same language; including the language of bureaucracies; and having more secure alternative sources of funding. Some national NGOs are large and experienced enough to compete on these fronts, but most cannot. International NGOs also have a potential advantage in being able to draw on their wealth of experience in other countries.

In the evaluator's opinion, the most significant differences among the NGOs that implemented the reintegration program were in terms of—

- Being able and willing to operate in insecure areas (described above).
- Mobilizing local communities and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the community-based approach (addressed later in this report).
- Being able to communicate in English and written reports.
- Continuing similar educational programs in the same districts and provinces.

The ability to communicate progress, problems, and results in English is important, but UNICEF certainly was willing to accept a trade-off for national NGOs that could and would mobilize local support and operate in insecure areas. This trade-off was important and laudable. Selecting a national NGO that may not have a strong track record or administrative support is risky, but is clearly essential in situations of tenuous and fluctuating security. Unfortunately, too often an international NGO that presents an attractive proposal receives the contract when a less-fluent national NGO would be more successful in doing the actual work. Of course, as has happened a few times with the D&R project, once an international NGO receives the contract, it subcontracts a national NGO to implement the project on the ground.

9.2 CONTINUATION OF DISTRICT PROGRAMS

Continuing similar educational programs (the core of the reintegration program) and continuing to work in the same districts and provinces addresses the issue of sustainability and longer term impact. This continuation was important and variable. NGO reports to UNICEF almost universally noted that all the communities wanted the educational programs to continue. A few international NGOs decided to extend and expand these programs to more WAC and other people in the same districts and provinces. Other NGOs stopped children's educational programs when the reintegration program ended, and some NGOs even closed their district (and sometimes their provincial) programs.

X UNCERTAINTIES

The evaluation also identified some questionable areas where the outcome relies on how success or failure is measured.

10.1 SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION

The TOR for this evaluation included a question about defining successful reintegration and determining whether 12 months are adequate for a reintegration program. As noted earlier, the conditions for the reintegration of CS in Afghanistan are different than those in most African situations, which makes generalizing difficult.

Most of the CS in Afghanistan were stationed at home and remained integrated in their home society. Family tracing and reunification were not necessary. To a great extent, the Afghan CS were playing roles that were congruent with the culture, whereas most African CS situations involve children playing abnormal roles that alienate them from their society and often result in the children being feared by their families and communities. The alienation is often countered in postconflict African D&R programs by establishing projects (called Quick Impact Projects, or QIPs) in which trust and social relationships are created by the former CS working beside men (and sometimes women) villagers in reconstructing local infrastructure. This type of project was not needed in Afghanistan in terms of reestablishing local social relationships.

10.2 ACCEPTABLE PROFICIENCY

The literacy and vocational education courses of study lasted nine months and were the core of the 10–12-month reintegration program. This length of time was questioned by a number of NGOs. They did not think that the graduates were literate enough or had learned enough to become self-sufficient in their crafts or trades. Is a nine-month program long enough to achieve sufficient literacy? Is a nine-month vocational education program adequate for some vocations? For all vocations? How literate and how skilled does a graduate have to become in order for the program to be successful? There is no definitive general answer because proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills is debatable. How proficient is proficient enough?

10.3 MARKET DEMAND AND SATURATION

Another concern was whether some of the programs were teaching too many people the same skill or trade, so that when they graduated they would saturate or flood the local labor markets. Afghanistan is fortunate in that the years of conflict have not destroyed the local and national economy. There are opportunities for graduates of the D&R project to open shops, be employed, or, in the case of girls, produce for the market at home. This does not mean that the demand for skilled labor is insatiable. If local markets are flooded, many of these graduates could not or would not want to emigrate to regions where there was sufficient demand, which would mean that the graduates would remain unemployed.

UNICEF and the NGOs stated that the choice of vocations reflected a 2003 Labour Market Information Survey funded by USDOL and conducted by MOLSAMD. Information from the

national market survey was supplemented by asking local leaders about the skills and trades that were needed locally. The popularity of the agriculture option probably reflected an awareness of the limits of local demand for skilled labor.

Many of the same skills were taught in every district, but there was some variation among different districts and NGOs. The choices for girls were generally limited to tailoring, embroidery, or carpet-weaving (and “beauty shop” in one program), but there were more choices for boys. Hopefully the project did not saturate any of the local markets by graduating too many people in any skill or trade.

Many community leaders and graduates asked that the same program of literacy and vocational training be repeated in their districts so that more children/youth could benefit. This might be self-defeating, depending on the extent to which employment opportunities exist for more graduates. MOLSAMD representatives consistently cautioned against the tendency to repeat a good thing once too often. It is too easy to generalize from one successful training program and repeat the same skills, resulting in an over-supply of skilled labor. This would result in unemployment among recent graduates and diminishing profits for earlier graduates.

This concern about saturating labor markets is not restricted to the D&R project. In some provinces, NGOs and programs supported by other donors are also providing skills trainings without necessarily considering the existing number of local individuals who already graduated with the same skills. UNICEF has already recommended to MOLSAMD that it coordinate all vocational training activities to ensure that training supported by NGOs and donors is in line with local market demands and absorption capabilities.

10.4 THIS EVALUATION

The evaluator’s perspective is that the primary objective of the D&R project was to provide the children with an educational and vocational head start to a better future. The evaluator’s opinion is that this education seems to have been accomplished successfully for many of the graduates of the D&R project. The majority of those who were interested in continuing their formal education seem to have been successful in entering the formal school system. However, bear in mind that many girls may have decided not to try to continue their schooling because they thought their parent or parents would not permit this. Similarly, the majority of those who decided to start working immediately seem to have been employed, started earning an income from their home, or opened shops on their own.

The evaluator’s opinion is that many of the graduates benefited from the reintegration program and were able to immediately use what they had learned in the workplace or in school. This evaluation is based on NGO reports when the NGOs checked on their graduates within one or two months after completing the reintegration program. What remains uncertain and a matter of opinion is whether the graduates of the reintegration program were able over the longer term of several years to maintain their employment and place in the formal school system. As was noted earlier, no one has established any long-term tracking of the graduates. Therefore, no one knows how successful the graduates were afterward in terms of continuing their schooling or employment.

XI LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

11.1 INCLUDING WAC WITH CS

In Afghanistan, the D&R project included both CS and WAC in the reintegration program. This inclusion is a lesson learned from experiences in other countries. As has been explained, CS are a special category of children in hazardous circumstances and deserve assistance, but that assistance should not be packaged in ways that segregate CS and appear to confer an advantage to those children who chose or were forced to become associated with the fighting forces. Including equivalent numbers of WAC in educational and employment-related programs was a better approach that immediately began the process of integrating CS with other children, fit the D&R project into a broader context of educating all children and attacking illiteracy, and did not send the wrong message about the benefits of becoming a CS.

11.2 REACHING OUT TO RURAL AREAS

UNICEF established a policy that the reintegration program sites should be located wherever there were concentrations of CS. CS were a rural phenomenon in Afghanistan because they were not mobilized in urban areas, but by commanders in rural areas. Transportation is difficult in many rural areas, but the project established itself where the CS were instead of requiring the CS to come to urban training centers, which meant that D&R project sites were scattered across districts and primarily in rural areas. This dispersion is exactly the opposite of what happens in most development (and many relief) projects that are located in or near urban areas. A project that focused on WAC would undoubtedly have been much more, if not entirely, an urban project.

Security is a major issue in Afghanistan, and people in many rural areas are conservative and suspicious of outsiders. Why are those strangers coming here? What do they want? Deciding to come to a district or a rural village because CS lived there was an easily understood reason that validated the arrival of the D&R project. Bringing educational and vocational programs to their local CS provided an obvious rationale for the D&R project to establish itself in many sites.

11.3 PROMOTING GIRLS' EDUCATION

The project asked that the number of WAC equal the number of CS, and gender equity was called for in selecting the WAC. Requiring large numbers of girl WAC was a best practice that promoted girls' education.

During his site visits to rural sites in Faryab Province where only CS (all boys) were attending classes in the reintegration program, the evaluator asked *shura* members (all men) what else they wanted or needed. The men replied that they wanted classes for their girls. This reply was surprising because Pasktonkot, the district adjacent to Maimana (the district capital), had been the only district that had allowed girls to be brought into the program. Whereas all of the CS lived in rural districts, all of the female WAC were in Pashtonkot.

The leaders were then questioned whether they had been asked at the beginning of the program whether they would allow their girls to attend classes. They all responded that things were different now. The men had originally refused to allow their girls to leave their homes to attend classes. Now the leaders had experienced the project. They had seen that the literacy and vocational educational programs were beneficial, and they had learned to trust the program.

The combination of far-flung rural sites and the building of trust during the reintegration program meant that the D&R project had a major multiplier effect across a wide and difficult-to-reach swath of rural Afghanistan. The D&R project established a girls' educational program in an environment where the local people had a measure of control through the *shura* and the use of local teachers, and that has had multiplier effects and opened the door in some districts to more programs for children and more educational opportunities for girls.

11.4 MAINSTREAMING OR TRANSITIONING OF LITERACY GRADUATES INTO FORMAL SCHOOLS

One of the most important problems accompanying any sort of special education or assistance program is supporting the students once they graduate. If the students are completely self-sufficient at the end of the program, there is no problem. However, what happens to those students who still require some sort of assistance? Will they fall through the cracks, or will they be able to transition to some other assistance?

A common institutional answer to this is mainstreaming, which means connecting the graduates to mainstream programs that are offered to everyone in the society. In this instance, this term refers to the formal school system and what happens to graduates of the literacy program.

UNICEF addressed this mainstreaming issue by working with the MOE in a number of ways, some of which were integral to the D&R project, and all of which were essential:

- The Back to School Program re-invigorated Afghanistan's regular school system, which then provided a mainstream into which D&R graduates could move to continue their education.
- The MOE revised its literacy textbooks.
- The MOE agreed to issue certificates to graduates of the literacy program.
- The MOE instituted a procedure whereby graduates of the literacy program could take a standardized test. Passing that test qualified the student to enter the regular school system.
- The D&R project used the government's literacy curriculum and textbooks.

This series of activities did not eliminate all of the educational problems, but did mean that mainstreaming CS and WAC graduates of the reintegration program became institutionalized. Graduates of the D&R project who wanted to continue their education entered a mainstream program as soon as they entered the D&R literacy program.

An additional cost and benefit of the literacy program became evident in talking with the CS and WAC in the program in the northern region. Many of the children were native Uzbek speakers and did not speak Dari before entering the program. The government's literacy program and the formal school system use only the two national languages—Dari and Pashto. These students were learning literacy and the Dari language at the same time.

The cost was that it was harder for children to learn literacy in a language they did not speak. The benefit was that the literacy program accomplished two mainstreaming activities at the same time. The children had to learn Dari or Pashto to be accepted into the formal school system. The literacy program provided both literacy and Dari instruction.

11.5 LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

The focus of the D&R project and this evaluation is upon the children/youth in the program. However, another obvious potential benefit from the project was the formation and operation of the *shura*. This benefit was noted in NGO reports and from interviewing committee members in Faryab where children/youth are still in the reintegration program, and in Jawzjan and Balkh where all of the children/youth have graduated.

The *shura* for the men usually had a similar composition—the mullah (imam for the local mosque), usually the *malek* or *arbob* (wealthy or influential man), elders, one or more representatives of the youth, and several representatives of the parents. The *shura* in these districts were created in response to the needs of the D&R project, but the elders and leaders of a number of the district *shura* have become involved in more activities. They have intervened to solve social problems, family conflicts, and conflicts over irrigation water that could have resulted in violence. The D&R project created a local governance mechanism that people in the districts may use to help solve local problems peacefully.

Even more dramatic was the *shura* for women in Pashtonkot district. That *shura* had also been established as a result of the D&R project in order to encourage and monitor the girls. The *shura* consisted of local women and women staff from the Department of Women's Affairs, and they took advantage of the local governance mechanism to intervene in a number of cases concerning women's and girls' rights. This *shura* had solved the mainstreaming problem because the members included staff from the Department of Women's Affairs. When they discovered problems, they could directly refer these to the department.

In countries where security is less of a problem, this project could be run from the top down, but in Afghanistan, *shura* support was essential for the smooth operation and success of this project. An active and involved *shura* meant that the locality had more control over the project, and more local control meant better security and more trust. In addition, as shown above, this project had the potential to lay the foundation for local self-governance and to open the door for more

educational opportunities for girls. For this potential to become a reality, the locality had to feel more confident that it retained some control over the process.

The NGOs that implemented reintegration had different mandates, experiences, and resources. Some of them were already oriented toward and experienced in community mobilization and community-initiated development, and they were more successful at recruiting and mobilizing the *shura* to support the project. This success also affected the degree to which the governance potential of the *shura* would be realized.

11.6 COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The project did not rely on any single method to withdraw and prevent children from being vulnerable to exploitation and hazard. Instead of trying to rely on literacy or vocational education by itself, the project used a more comprehensive approach that incorporated literacy and vocational education, recruited and educated parents and local leaders about children's rights, provided a substitute income for the families while their children were in classes, established local child protection committees, and involved ministries.

11.7 TRACKING

The importance of tracking beneficiaries after graduation is a lesson learned for future programs, but unfortunately was not a best practice of this project.

XII CONCLUSIONS

The D&R project achieved most of its objectives. Almost all identified CS were demobilized by the project. The 2002 rapid assessment estimated that there were 8,010 CS, and the original proposal to USDOL targeted 7,750 CS for reintegration. This figure slightly overestimated the actual number (7,476) who were demobilized. This overestimation is very common throughout the world. During hostilities, commanders inflate the numbers under their commands to intimidate their enemies, and during demobilization, commanders inflate their numbers to receive more benefits that are issued per capita.

Relatively few CS were remobilized (or re-recruited) nationwide. Unfortunately, there were delays after demobilization of several months up to a year in some provinces before reintegration began. All of the CS who were interviewed noted that they encountered difficulties during the interim period between demobilization and reintegration, and this was a time when some may have remobilized.

The D&R project succeeded in establishing a widespread (164 districts in 29 provinces) program of literacy, life skills, and vocational training, plus its psychosocial and medical components, in a country that was still insecure in many districts. The project also succeeded in establishing *shura* in districts throughout the country that provided community-based leadership and support for children's education, as well as providing a mechanism for local self-governance.

The D&R project included an equivalent number of CS and WAC with gender equity among the WAC. This approach immediately began the process of integrating the CS with other children and fit the D&R project into a broader context of educating all children and attacking illiteracy, which fit within the broader context of national socioeconomic recovery.

The project succeeded in providing full reintegration benefits to 7,563 boys and 3,916 girls, or a total of 11,479 children. However, the project did not achieve its original target of reintegrating 7,750 CS and 7,000 WAC, or a total of 14,750 children. A major reason for the shortfall is that the project never managed to implement reintegration in four provinces due to security reasons.

Even more children (12,725) received some of the benefits of the reintegration program, although they did not complete all of the courses. For example, 8,539 boys completed vocational training, although not the literacy course, while 4,186 girls completed the literacy course, but not the vocational skills training.

UNICEF has leveraged and extended the impact of the USDOL funding by combining it with other funds coming from a variety of organizations. In this way, US\$3 million from USDOL helped generate a total of US\$7 million for this D&R project. Some of the NGOs also received other funding to build on and extend the D&R project.

In addition to implementing the D&R project, UNICEF has a broader program of children's rights and education that extends beyond and has facilitated the cooperative agreement between UNICEF and USDOL. UNICEF has succeeded in mobilizing and coordinating a wide range of stakeholders at national, provincial, and community levels to raise the awareness of the

importance of children's rights, protection, and education (including CS and WAC, boys and girls). This broader agenda includes implementing the Back to School Program, encouraging the GTIRA to ratify the Optional Protocol for the Protection of Children, promoting a Presidential decree setting the minimum age (18 years) for enrollment into the national army, establishing the National Strategy for Children at Risk, and cooperating in the emerging National Youth Program, which is coordinated by the MOCY. All of these activities are fully congruent with USDOL's EI goals.

Putting this together, UNICEF and its NGO implementing partners have achieved the purposes of the D&R project. USDOL has achieved even more because its funding provided important and timely support that strengthened UNICEF's and NGOs' continued involvement in Afghan children's protection and educational programs.

XIII RECOMMENDATIONS

Separate child and adult soldiers during reintegration. Child soldiers have different needs, vulnerabilities, opportunities (such as the potential to continue schooling), and rights than adults. Child soldier reintegration programs should be separated or distinct from the programs for adults.

Combine war-affected children with child soldiers during reintegration. Establishing programs that provide post-conflict services and benefits only to child soldiers delays the social and educational reintegration of the former soldiers and sends the wrong message about the advantages of becoming a soldier.

Require gender parity among the war-affected children who are selected for the reintegration program. This is an excellent opportunity to alleviate gender disadvantages in education.

Emphasize local communal participation and leadership in establishing and managing reintegration programs. Social reintegration occurs at the family and community levels. The advantages of emphasizing local involvement and control are very apparent in Afghanistan because of the insecurity and cultural/religious mistrust. Everywhere, even in secure post-conflict situations, the success and sustainability of social reintegration relies on local acceptance and leadership.

Identify and address family income restraints and opportunities. Family poverty may inhibit the willingness of families to enroll their children and inhibit the ability of children to devote time to their education. Reducing family poverty may be essential to the success of a child-oriented program.

Conduct market surveys before deciding on vocational skills training and before selecting the skills to be taught. Skills training is appropriate only when there are post-completion employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. There may be only a limited local market for any specific skill or trade.

Establish transitional linkages to mainstream institutions and sustainable futures whenever possible. Address the question of what happens post-completion. See if there are ways to link and process the transition of literacy graduates into formal schools. See if there are ways to link graduates of vocational programs to employment or micro-credit to establish shops.

Establish post-completion tracking as an integral component in any reintegration and educational programs for children. The only way to monitor and evaluate the impact, success, and sustainability of reintegration and educational programs is to track children for several years after they complete the program. The only way to identify the best practices that contribute to longer term sustainable programs is to monitor/track children post-completion. Plans and funding for this tracking should be an integral part of the original design for these programs.